

# Counting Down the Days

A short excerpt from “Guideposts Magazine” tells this story. You’ll like it. It’s a good one. The author writes, “One hot summer afternoon, my wife and I were invited to a swimming pool party by some friends. As I stood on the diving board, I felt as free as the breeze, when suddenly a frantic voice rose above the din crying out, “My baby! He’s at the bottom of the pool!” No one did anything. People just stared at the woman.

When I saw what looked like a motionless form beneath the water, I dove in, and a baby **was** there. I swept him off the bottom and laid him on the deck. He was blue and wasn’t breathing. Nor did he have a pulse. So I started CPR praying, “Dear God, help me do this right.” At last the little boy coughed. A breath came, then another. He was going to live. An ambulance was called, and while we waited, I asked the others, “Why didn’t you do something? Why did you ignore that mother’s cry for help?”

“We didn’t understand her,” they said. “What do you mean? Didn’t you hear her screaming for someone to help her baby?” “No,” they said. “She was speaking Spanish, and none of us could understand her.” “What do you mean, Spanish?” I said. “I heard her screaming in English.” “We didn’t,” they said. “All we heard was Spanish.” “To this day, I’m still bewildered because I don’t speak a word of Spanish either.”

God moves in mysterious ways, His wonders to perform; He plants His footsteps in the sea, and rides upon the storm. You fearful saints, fresh courage take. The clouds you so much dread are big with mercy and shall break with blessings on your head.” We serve an amazing God, don’t we? He’s amazing in His power, amazing in His wisdom, amazing in His mercy. In fact, if not for His amazing love and desire for us to know Him, we wouldn’t be able to understand a thing about Him. “For My thoughts are not your thoughts nor are your ways My ways,” says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:8-9) You see, if it were up to us to figure out God, we would never know Him. For how can the finite mind of man ever hope to know the infinite mind of God! We just don’t have the equipment to do that. But then, God hasn’t left us to ourselves. He became one of us in the Person of His only begotten Son, died on a cross for our sins, drew us to Himself through the work of His Spirit, and revealed His plans to us in His Holy Word.

So that’s our focus on tonight. Our passage is Daniel chapter 9 where we find one of the most powerful prayers ever prayed as well as one of the most pivotal prophecies in all of Scripture. As we study it, what I want to emphasize are three amazing attributes of the God we love. The first is the intimacy of His friendship.

# 1. The Friendship of God

Daniel has been cultivating a friendship with God all his life spending time in prayer and Bible reading three times a day every day. By the way, if that hasn't been your habit, start now, not because you ought to but because you're missing out if you don't. You know that great feeling of taking time for yourself and relaxing with a cup of coffee and a good book? Now imagine letting Holy Spirit join you in that because that's what a quiet time is—taking time to rest in God's presence reading a few verses from the Bible and talking to Him about your needs. Do that once a day and it'll change your life! In this case, what Daniel was studying was the prophecy of Jeremiah where God promised that in spite of His people's sin, He'd forgive them and bring them home from 70 years of captivity in Babylon. And as he rereads the passage, he suddenly realizes—have you ever had that happen, rereading a passage of Scripture you've read before and suddenly something leaps out at you that you've never noticed? That is the Holy Spirit at work in your mind—and suddenly, as Daniel reads this passage, he realizes that the 70 years are almost over. So what does he do? He goes to prayer and asks God to keep His promise. And God answers way beyond his expectations!

1 John chapter 5 wasn't written yet; but it was still true both then and now. “And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.” Isn't that an amazing promise? I'd say that's a verse worth memorizing. What do you think?

One of the best examples is right here in Daniel chapter 9. He says in verse 20: “Now while I was speaking and praying and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel and presenting my supplication before the Lord...while I was still (praying)...the man Gabriel (at least he looked like a man), whom I had seen in the vision previously, came to me in my extreme weariness about the time of the evening offering. He gave me instruction and talked with me and said, ‘O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you insight with understanding.’” The moment Daniel started praying, God answered by sending Gabriel to him, the same angel who later appears to the Virgin Mary. How long did that take? I timed it at home to see how long it takes to read his prayer, and guess what! It took me 3 minutes! 3 minutes for Gabriel to arrive in answer to his prayer!

As Gaebelein, the German pastor put it, “Heaven is not far away. There is no space and distance for God. The moment we pray in the Spirit and in His name, our voices are heard in the highest heaven.” Why? Because we're His children—princes and princesses of the Most High King! So take advantage of it! For the Bible says, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us!” Daniel's prayer highlights one of the most important truths we can take into our minds, and that's the friendship of God. Abraham

is another example, for what did God do just before He destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah? He told Abraham about it, so he could pray for his nephew Lot. And the same is true of us! Jesus said, “No longer do I call you servants for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for everything I’ve heard from My Father, I’ve made known to you.” And that’s Gabriel’s purpose here. In fact, that’s the purpose of all prophecy—God sharing His heart and plans with His friends.

My friend Mark didn’t appreciate this. Mark is the friend from college who led me to faith in Jesus Christ. So we got together some time back to catch up on what the Lord was doing in our lives. I mentioned that I was studying prophecy and was excited about the Lord’s return. His reaction: Why are you wasting time doing that? Don’t tell me you’re one of those Christians who thinks the Lord is coming back in our lifetime!” And when I said, “I think He may,” he got even more irritable. So rather than ruin our time arguing, I changed the subject. But so often that’s the reaction you get when you talk about prophecy. People rolls their eyes and think you’re naïve and irrelevant. “After all, what’s that got to do with me?” Friends, I hope you don’t feel like that, because not only does this prophecy have a great deal to do with you and me; it’s also the King of the Universe sharing His heart with us His friends.

That’s the first truth revealed in this passage—the intimacy of God’s friendship. The second truth follows in verses 24 to 27, and that’s the faithfulness of His promises.

## **2. The Faithfulness of God**

Daniel has been studying prophecy and realizes that the time is short. So he kneels in prayer and not only asks God to keep His promise, but to show him if there’s a role he’s to play in it. Remember! Cyrus the Great is about to conquer Babylon and is going to need some trusted advisers who know the culture and language of Babylon.

So guess who he’s going to enlist as one of his chief counselors! That’s right! Daniel who will show him his name in the book of Isaiah where it says that he, Cyrus, will be the king who gives the decree that God’s people can go home and rebuild their Holy City! All of that is in Daniel’s mind as he goes to prayer. In response, God not only gives him assurance of their present deliverance, but one of the most pivotal prophecies in Scripture, describing the final salvation of His people, both nationally and spiritually. But before we get to that, let me say this very kindly. It takes patience to understand this prophecy, just as it does all the prophecies of the Bible. That’s intentional on God’s part. Prophecy is God sharing His heart with His friends. So He makes us dig a little knowing that we who love Him will make the effort, whereas those who don’t won’t bother no matter how important it is. I’ll never forget working with a history teacher years ago and trying to share my faith with him by telling him about the prophecies fulfilled in the book

of Daniel. I thought he'd be interested because it had to do with history. Not a chance! He had no interest whatsoever because he didn't have a heart for God! As 1 Corinthians 2 explains, "The natural man does not welcome the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; neither can he understand them, for they are spiritually discerned." But you can understand them because you have both the Spirit and a heart for God.

So let's take a few minutes to try to understand what Gabriel is saying. He explains in verse 24: "Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the Most Holy Place."

The first detail to notice is the number "seven" which is the number of completion in the Bible. God completed His work of creation in how many days? Seven! Jacob worked for Laban how many years before he could marry Rachel? Seven! There were how many years of plenty and how many years of famine in the land of Egypt? Seven of both! And how many times did the children of Israel march around the city of Jericho on the seventh day before the walls came "tumbling down"? Seven! And the examples go on and on.

And the same thing is true here. Gabriel says there will be seventy more "sevens" before God completes His work of redeeming the nation of Israel. Your Bible may read "weeks" instead of "sevens," and that can be confusing. But much of the confusion can be overcome if we understand that the Hebrew word here is *Shabuwa* which means "a heptad" or group of seven. It's similar to our word "dozen," which refers to any group of twelve things - a dozen donuts, a dozen eggs, a dozen cookies, etc. So in order to avoid confusion, from this point on in our study, I will use the word "sevens" instead of "weeks."

In this case, Gabriel says that God's work of redeeming Israel will be completed after "seventy sevens," or 490 if you multiply the two figures together. "490 what?" you ask. In this case, he is describing not 490 days, but 490 years. If you consider what Gabriel includes in the time frame here - the rebuilding of the city and temple of Jerusalem, the atonement of Christ, and the end of sin - it is clear that these things could not and were not fulfilled in just 490 years.

In fact, to make it easier to understand, Gabriel breaks the "70 sevens" down for us starting in verse 25. He says, "So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven 'sevens' and sixty-two 'sevens'; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress." The first seven 'sevens' or 49 years, then, was the amount of time it took the people of Israel to return and rebuild their city and its temple. That was then followed by an additional sixty-two 'sevens' or 434 years of

waiting during which God seemed to be silent because there were no more prophets sent to them until John the Baptizer began to cry out in the wilderness, “Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand!”

So add these two blocks of time together (seven “sevens” and sixty-two “sevens”) —remember I said we’d have to do some thinking here—and what do we get? Sixty-nine “sevens” or 483 years before Messiah would appear. Harold Hoehner, a professor at Dallas Seminary, wrote a book about this. Using the Jewish calendar of 360 days and starting with Cyrus’ decree in 444 B.C., that the city of Jerusalem should be rebuilt, he added 483 years to it and pinpointed the exact day on which this prophecy was fulfilled—March 30, 33 A.D! Do you know what happened on that day? The Lord Jesus Christ rode into Jerusalem on a donkey offering Himself to the nation of Israel as their long-awaited! God’s Word was literally fulfilled down to the very day. In fact, the Jews could have set their watches by it, if they'd had watches in those days.

Then what happened? Verse 26 says, “After the sixty-two 'sevens' the Messiah will be cut off (the phrase means to ‘execute’) and have nothing.” Did that happen to Jesus? It did. The crowd that cheered for Him on Sunday turned against Him and called for His execution on Friday leaving Him with absolutely nothing, not even the clothes on his back! The Roman soldiers gambled for his clothes, and Jesus was made to hung naked upon the cross. In fact, He was so poor that He also had to be buried in the borrowed tomb of a friend named Joseph of Arimathea.

The prophecy continues, “The people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined.” “Wait a minute!” you say. “Didn't we just read about Messiah coming and being 'cut off'?” You’re right! We did. “Then who is this second prince?” He’s the false prince and counterfeit messiah who will come from the same people group as those who destroyed Jerusalem and its Temple. Do you see that in the verse above? The people came first and their prince comes later. We’ll learn more about that in verse 27.

But first, who were the people that destroyed Jerusalem and its Temple? Four Roman legions under the command of Titus, who burned Jerusalem to the ground in 70 A.D.! In fact, it is interesting. When Titus marched into Jerusalem with his armies, he ordered his soldiers to leave the Temple intact. But one soldier, acting on impulse, threw a torch into the sanctuary to get a better look at its treasures. That caught the tapestries on fire, and the building was soon a raging inferno, which fulfilled a second prophecy. All that decorative gold in the Temple soon melted and ran down into the cracks in the floor. So when it finally cooled, the soldiers literally overturned every stone to get at it, not only fulfilling Daniel’s

prophecy that the Temple would be destroyed, but also the words of Jesus who said, "Not one stone will be left upon another which will not be torn down." (Luke 21:6)

The Word of God is alive and powerful and absolutely trustworthy, not one word of it ever failing to come true. So believe in it and trust it more than you ever have before, both for your salvation and for every other need in your life.

But what about the seventieth "seven"? Has that been fulfilled yet? No. That's still future. You see, something unexpected happened when Israel rejected their Messiah. God's time clock for Israel temporarily stopped leaving one more "seven" to be fulfilled. And it will be fulfilled right on schedule just as the first sixty-nine "sevens" were fulfilled!

How will we know when the last 'seven' has begun? Verse 27 says, "He will make a firm covenant with the many for one 'seven'." In other words, God's prophetic clock for the nation of Israel will begin ticking again when a Roman prince signs a peace treaty with Israel for a period of seven years. That has never happened at any time in history. There has never been a prince rise out of the region that Rome once ruled, promising peace to Israel. "Nor will that ever happen!" you say. "There will never be peace in the Middle East!" Not genuine peace perhaps. But that is what he will promise. In fact, that's how Orthodox rabbis say they will recognize the Messiah when He comes. He will bring peace to Israel and the conditions under which they can rebuild their Temple. Sadly, he will not be the true Messiah; he will be a wolf in shepherd's clothing—the antichrist who will betray them in the middle of the last seven years and try by the power of Satan to destroy the Jewish people once and for all.

Verse 27 says, "He will make a firm covenant with the many for one 'seven' but in the middle of the 'seven' he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate." Do you realize that none of this was possible just 70 years ago? Because for 1878 years, there was no Jewish nation! Israel did not become a nation again until May 14, 1948. Furthermore, prior to 1945, all of Europe was involved in a great war, making a European union over which the antichrist could rule absolutely impossible. But what was impossible then is more than possible today!

Alan Franklin, editor of "The Free Press" and a frequent guest on "Christ in Prophecy" said this in a recent message. "In Europe the Roman Empire has returned. At Christ's First Advent, Rome was ruling the earth, and when He comes back, Rome will be ruling again." José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, said it this way: "Sometimes I like to compare the EU to the

organization of an empire because we have the dimension of an empire." Very understated but that's what they intend to do.

In fact, here are their stated goals and the way they plan to do it: 1) Move the headquarters of the United Nations to Europe and replace America as the leader of the world; 2) Bring all of Europe under one jurisdiction making it one great super-nation with one central bank and one central court of justice; 3) Expand their jurisdiction into North Africa and the Arab nations as Ancient Rome once did; and 4) Eliminate the borders, so there's no distinction between Europeans, Africans, and Middle Easterners. Their goal is to unite all of Europe under one central rule which is highly bureaucratic and has absolute power.

How likely is all of this to happen? Just as likely as the first sixty-nine 'sevens' were fulfilled! Both the book of Daniel and the book of Revelation say that there is a day coming when the whole world will united together under a final dictator known as the beast or antichrist. How soon that happens is something that God alone will decide. He can allow it to happen very soon, or He can hold it off for another hundred years. But even now I think we see the stage being set for it. In fact, having lived in Europe from 1995 to 2000 and having made more than a dozen ministry trips to Europe since then, I can tell you that their goals are well on the way to being realized. Did you know, for example, that 75% of the laws made in Europe today originate not in the individual countries but in the European Parliament where there's virtually no debate and members rarely understand what they're voting for? Sound familiar?

Of course, all of this talk about the antichrist and his reign of terror can cause a great deal of anxiety, can't it? But we don't need to be anxious, if we are trusting in Jesus, for we are His beloved, and He always looks out for those He loves. In fact, it's my belief that the Lord will remove His Bride from the world before the last 'seven' begins. For the seventy 'sevens' are about Israel, not the church! And just as there was no church on earth when the first sixty-nine 'sevens' were took place, I don't believe the church will remain on earth when the seventieth 'seven' is fulfilled. After all, remember who we Christians are! We're the Bride of Christ, and what kind of Husband would He be not to rescue His Bride from danger? That's "Job 1" for a Christ-like husband - protecting his wife from harm.

Now on to God's amazing grace. The first great truth about Him is the intimacy of His friendship; the second great truth is His faithfulness to His promises; and the third great truth about Him is His amazing grace towards those He loves.

### 3. The Amazing Grace of God

Two examples are found right here in our passage. The first is written between the lines in verse 27. It's that long, gracious gap between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks that Daniel wasn't told about at the time. In fact, it isn't mentioned anywhere in the Old Testament, but it's on virtually every page of the New Testament. For what took place immediately following Christ's death for our sins and before the antichrist could appear? Something incredibly gracious! God opened the gates of His kingdom to us miserable Gentile sinners and welcomes us to become fellow members of His family and one day walk the streets of New Jerusalem with great Jewish saints like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Sarah, Ruth, and Esther, Moses, David, and Daniel. That's what's written between the lines here in verse 27—the great age of God's grace in which we now live, which has lasted almost two thousand years and during which time both Jew and Gentile can become brothers and sisters in Christ and members of God's forever family called the church. That was the gracious secret God kept to Himself in the Old Testament. But now that Christ has shed His blood for our sins and miraculously risen from the dead, He wants everyone in every place to know about it.

Paul explains the secret in Ephesians 3:4-6. By the way, that's he means by "mystery" in these verses. He's talking about something incredibly wonderful that was kept secret in times past, but is now to be made known to every person in every place under heaven. He says, "In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus." Do you realize what he's saying! He's saying that the reason God punched the pause button on His prophetic clock and made the Jewish nation wait two thousand years for their kingdom to begin was to allow enough time for you to be born, give your heart to Christ, and win the rest of your family to Him as well. Isn't that amazing grace! God did that because He has loved you from eternity past and wanted you to be His child!

Finally, one last comment about verse 27: God is also going to be incredibly gracious to the nation of Israel, who rejected His Son at His first coming and will turn to antichrist when he appears. Jesus said to them, "I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive." (John 5:43) Consequently, what does the Jewish nation deserve? Whatever antichrist does to them! But that's not what they get—at least not those who resist him. They get salvation both nationally and spiritually. Verse 27 concludes, "On the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator." In other words, the antichrist, not Israel, is the one that's destroyed and punished forever.

And Israel? Both Daniel, Zechariah, Paul, and Jesus Himself say that it's at that moment that the Lord Jesus will return from heaven and all Israel will be saved. That's grace!

So if you're in need of love and compassion, look no farther than the Lord Jesus Christ because He is here and He has loved you from time began. You're going to see that portrayed at the Lord's Table tonight. So as I bow my head and close this time in prayer, open your heart to Him and ask Him to come into you and fellowship with you, and He will! For He is your friend, the Friend that sticks closer than a brother!